Assessing Student Learning & Reflections on Graduate Education

In her book *Assessment Clear and Simple* (2004), Barbara Walvoord defines assessment as “the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning” (pp.2). Palomba & Banta (1999) also discuss the benefits of good assessment in enhancing student learning, asserting that it “enables educators to examine whether the curriculum makes sense in its entirety and whether students, as a result of their experiences, have the knowledge, skills and values that graduates should possess” (pp. 5).

It is in this spirit that this issue’s featured authors reflect on the assessment tools and strategies they use in their respective classrooms. For example, Dr Iliana Magiati (Dept of Psychology) talks about how mapping the professional competencies that characterise her discipline (clinical psychology) onto the aims and assessment methods of the postgraduate module she teaches has benefited her students in terms of ensuring a more targeted development of their knowledge and clinical skills (see pp. 5). In a similar vein, Ms Chua Siew Beng (Dept of Management & Organisation, HRM Unit) ponders the benefits and challenges of using rubrics to assess students’ learning. Her article (on pp. 2) describes how a well-designed rubric, where the criteria for evaluation are clearly and comprehensively articulated, not only facilitates the evaluation process but also enables deeper learning. Meanwhile, Dr Peter Alan Todd and Dr Darren Yeo (Dept of Biological Sciences) examine the issue from a different perspective, questioning whether students are doing too much continuous assessment (CA) in their courses. In their article (on pp. 11), they share the results of a survey they conducted amongst their students to find out if this is the case. They also look into what students consider a reasonable CA workload, and the types of CAs (e.g. quizzes, take-home essays) students feel are valuable in enhancing their learning.

We are also pleased to include an article which considers what the writers call “the critical interactions that underlie graduate education” (pp. 16). Dr Saif A. Khan, A/P Laksh Samavedham and Professor Farooq Shamsuzzaman candidly reflect on common tensions that inform graduate education, including the lack of agreed outcomes between the student and their thesis supervisors and mismatched performance expectations. Their article also looks into some ways such tensions can be managed with the ultimate aim of “growing” well-educated scholars from these graduate programmes.

References: